Turkish Mediation Diplomacy: Institutional Mechanisms, Track Records and the Ankara Process

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Abstract

Türkiye has become a prominent player in mediation diplomacy since 2003, as the Justice and Development Party (AKP) have prioritized mediation engagements across the world, leveraging it as a strategic instrument of Turkish foreign policy. In this regard, the present paper examines the implications of Turkish mediation diplomacy, with a particular focus on the Ankara process that deescalated tension between Ethiopia and Somaliland over the Ethiopia-Somaliland 2024 Memorandum of Understanding. The paper relied on an explanatory qualitative research design, employing a combination of primary and secondary data sources. The findings revealed that Turkish mediation efforts have yielded notable successes despite persistent challenges. Türkiye played a pivotal role in de-escalating tensions between Ethiopia and Somalia following the Ankara declaration. By facilitating dialogue and bringing Ethiopia and Somalia to the negotiation table, Ankara declaration has had the potential to counter Egypt's calculated subversive maneuvers aimed at undermining Ethiopia's national interests. Consequently, the future of the Egyptian–Eritrean–Somali alliance appears increasingly uncertain, and the recent strain between Ethiopia and Somalia has notably eased

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Introduction

In recent years, having emerged as a regional actor in Europe, Middle East and Africa, Türkiye has expanded its foreign relations across the world (Rugutt et al., 2023). Afro-Turkish engagements have been particularly pronounced following Ankara's ambitious and multi-faceted long-term strategies. Historically, the late 1990s marked a significant paradigm shift in the Turkish foreign policy towards Africa (Dipama and Parlar, 2023). This shift was largely derived by the European Union's rejection of Turkish membership bid at the 1997 summit (Özkan, 2017). Consequently, Türkiye's problem with the European Union forced Ankara to turn its attention away from Europe, necessitating to launch the "Africa Action Plan" in 1998 (Horn Bulletin, 2022). This strategy catalyzed the re-establishment of the historical partnership between Africa and Turkiye, dating back to the era of the Ottoman Empire (Elem, 2012). Notwithstanding, the Turkish government

could not effectively implement several elements of the plan until 2005. Importantly, Turkish adoption of a new "Open to Africa Policy" in 2005, and the declaration of the same very year as "the Year of Africa" brought the aforementioned plan to the fore with renewed efforts of engagement, notably through mediation diplomacy (Bacchi, 2015).

Türkiye's has become a key player of mediation diplomacy since the Justice and Development Party (AKP) formally adopted the platform as a strategic instrument of it foreign policy since 2003. Consequently, Turkish mediation engagements have become prominent internationally. Somalia, Ethiopia, Libya, Afghanistan, Iraq, Israel, Azerbaijan, Russia, Ukraine, Palestinian and Iran are some of the beneficiary countries that could be cited in this regard (Sofos, 2022). Beyond bilateral efforts, Turkiye has also shown a strong commitment to multilateral mediation diplomacy. This is epitomized by the establishment of the joint Turkish-Finnish Friends of Mediation Initiative, launched under the auspices of the United Nations Organizations. The commitment of Turkiye and other supporting countries on the initiative finally led to the development of Friends of Mediation Group.

Turkish proactive role in mediation diplomacy has a potential to reshape the frame through which Turkish engagement with Africa is perceived. Ankara's acclaim as a "reliable and impartial mediator" coupled with its strategic importance for the Global North and South, makes Turkiye as a suitable mediator (Davutoğlu, 2013). Quite on the contrary, though Turkish mediation diplomacy has gained widespread acceptance, its recent motive towards more assertive geopolitical and security roles may prompt a cautious response from African countries, including Ethiopia (Clingendael, 2019). In this regard, the unpredictable nature of its engagement with different countries is worth to be mentioned (Mukerem, 2024). Indeed, Turkish assertive involvement in mediation diplomacy exemplified by the Ankara Declaration has helped to mitigate apprehensions related to Turkiye while reaffirming its commitment to balanced diplomacy. The present study, therefore, intends to explore the implications of its mediation diplomacy for Ethiopia.

Research Method

The paper relied on an explanatory qualitative research design in order to examine the implications of Turkiye's mediation diplomacy. A combination of both primary and secondary data sources was employed. With regard to the primary data, key informant interviews were conducted with selected participants, who were purposively approached based on their expert knowledge of the subject. . These include experts from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Institute of Foreign Affairs. Meanwhile, to

supplement the primary data, a review of secondary data sources was conducted. Therefore, books, scholarly articles, journals, media reports, archival materials, policy documents, published and unpublished materials were analyzed in light of the objective of the study. Finally, the collected qualitative data were thematically analyzed and interpreted in line with the research objectives of the study.

Turkish Institutional Mechanisms of Mediation Diplomacy

Türkiye has positioned itself as a reliable and impartial mediation actor on the global stage, highlighting a growing interest in resolving conflicts through dialogue rather than a military might (Capital, 2024). Ahmet Davutoğlu, former Turkish Foreign Minister, argued that neutrality and objectivity are important elements of Turkish mediation efforts. Neutrality means not favoring one side, and objectivity refers to being on the side of truth (Davutoğlu, 2013). Yet many analysts question whether Türkiye is a reliable and impartial mediator given its own national interests in the outcomes of its mediation engagements to be met at the end of mediation engagements. In addition, Türkiye may encounter several challenges that testits neutrality in practice. Against these challenges, "Türkiye has played an indispensible role in resolving conflicts predominantly in the Middle East and North Africa, claiming a neutral position."[1] From the Turkish perspective, its strong commitment to mediation diplomacy is evident through various platforms. Notably, the institutionalization of mediation diplomacy in its foreign policy along with a track record of mediation engagements, exemplifies Turkish interest in conducting "reliable mediation" efforts. In addition, there are signs suggesting that the quest for global prestige motivates Türkiye to remain reliable while participating in mediation engagements.

Institutionalization of Mediation Diplomacy in Turkish Foreign Policy

The Turkish government has institutionalized mediation diplomacy as a foreign policy tool by establishing various institutional frameworks. Türkiye has established the Group of Friends of Mediation, Mediation for Peace Certificate Program, Directorate General for International Mediation, and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) Contact Group on Mediation to manage Turkish mediation diplomacy in various ways.. Understanding of these frameworks highlights the extent of Turkish continued commitment to global peace diplomacy and the wider recognition Ankara gains in return for its mediation diplomacy.

[1] Interview Data, 2024

Mediation Diplomacy as Instrument of Turkish Quest for Global Prestige

Turkish policy-makers have described their country as a "natural-born mediator," one in which mediation occupies a central place in Turkish foreign policy (Süleymanoğlu-Kürüm, 2011). The geographic location of Turkiye has strengthened its mediation capabilities in the Global South. Compared to traditional mediation actors of the Global North, such as the US, Canada, and Switzerland, Türkiye has established itself as a more effective middle-power mediator from the Global South, aiming to resolve the problems of the Global South as a partner from within the same geopolitical sphere. This is particularly visible following the rejection of Türkiye's EU membership bid, which enhanced Türkiye's diplomatic relations in regions like Africa and ultimately helped craft its image as a "trustworthy" partner in Africa and on the global stage at large.. Hence, "as a rational state actor, Türkiye would maintain its global prestige accorded for being neutral at any cost" (Anadolu Agency, 2024). Though Türkiye, like other states, puts its interests first, it will remain committed to keeping its global prestige – a step that requires reliability and impartiality during mediation engagements.

Seemingly cognizant that the politics of prestige plays a crucial role in foreign policy, Türkiye has strived to be a reliable mediation actor. Just as the desire for prestige is an element of relations between individuals, prestige politics is one of the elements of international relations. In this era of globalization, the struggle for power is no longer waged through traditional methods such as oppression or military force. Instead, it takes place through a much broader struggle for people's minds, in which prestige has become a very important instrument (Unal, 2019).

The Track Record of Turkish Mediation Diplomacy

Mediation – traditionally known as *Ahilik* – has a long history in the Turkish history, dating back to the Seljuk and Ottoman periods. In the contemporary Turkish legal system, the principle of *Ahilik* has remained instrumental, with its focuson dialogue, fairness, and community (Australian Dispute Center, 2023). The 2012 Turkish legislation (The Code on Mediation in Legal Disputes) defines mediation as follows:

> A way of resolving disputes voluntarily and with the participation of an unbiased and independent expert who has received specialized training in systematic techniques. This expert brings the parties together to negotiate, provides a communication process between them to enable them to understand each other and generate their own solutions, and offers a solution in the event that the parties are unable to produce their own."(Yazici, n.d.).

Mediation diplomacy plays a crucial role in Turkish foreign policy, particularly under the leadership of AKP since 2003 (Sofos, 2022). Since then, Türkiye has increased its mediation diplomacy at both the bilateral and multilateral levels. Most recently, the Turkish government conducted a successful mediation between Ethiopia and Somalia to resolve the dispute over access to the Red Sea coast.. Several concerned parties, including IGAD, the EU and AU, warmly welcomed the Turkish mediation endeavor.

The success of Ankara's growing mediation efforts has enabled the country to mediate various issues across the world such as nuclear disputes, the Gulf crisis, border disputes, and, more recently, access to the sea, to mention a few.. Accordingly, Iran, Somalia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Philippines, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Kosovo, Serbia, Ethiopia, and Somaliland are among the countries that have witnessed Turkish mediation diplomacy (Seven, 2024).

Table 1.1 Türkiye's **Mediation Engagements from 2010-2024**

Year	Country	Issue of the Mediation
2010	Iran	Nuclear initiative
2013	Somalia-Somaliland	Ankara communiqué
2014	Afghanistan- Pakistan	Trilateral agreement
2016	Iraq	Internal reconciliation
2017	Lebanon	Internal reconciliation
2018	Palestine	Internal reconciliation
2019	Kyrgyzstan	Internal reconciliation
2020	Afghanistan-Pakistan	Enhancing cooperation mechanism
2022	Sudan-South Sudan	Trust-building
2023	Israel-Syria	Facilitating indirect talks
2024	Ukraine-Russia	Mediation and facilitation efforts
2024	Ethio-Somalia disputes	Mediation and facilitation efforts

Source: Turkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2024)

Türkiye's mediation diplomacy has been notable since 2010. The post-2010 period

marked Ankara's broader steps to institutionalize its mediation efforts while prioritizing mediation diplomacy as a key foreign policy instrument. The establishment of Mediation for Peace Initiative in 2010 is a case in point. The surge in Turkish mediation efforts on the global stage highlights Türkiye's credibility in resolving disputes is steadily increasing. "If Turkish mediation diplomacy were less worthy in terms of reliability, it would not see such remarkable achievement" – one participant said.

Ankara Process: A Litmus-Test for Turkish Mediation Diplomacy

Stakeholders from East to West welcomed the Turkish mediation efforts relating to Ethio-Somalia dispute. Many analysts consider the mediation as a litmus-test for Türkiye's aspirations to become a regional power broker, arguing that "the success of its mediation efforts on Ethio-Somalia disputes have serious implication on Turkish mediation role across the Horn region"[2]. In this perspective, the outcome of the mediation could serve as a model for how middle powers like Türkiye can use economic and cultural links to facilitate mediation diplomacy in complex regional scenarios. It also signals the challenges faced by mediators who have significant stakes in the disputes they seek to resolve.

Having a close relationship with both Ethiopia and Somalia, it is unsurprising that Türkiye "naturally" found itself as a key mediator amid the outbreak of conflict between the two Horn countries.. On their part, cognizant of the potential contribution of Turkish diplomacy in resolving conflicts, the neighboring countries – Ethiopia and Somalia – confirmed their commitment to a series of discussions. The four phases of discussion, as shown in Table 1.2, illustrate this. According to the World Policy Hub Report (2024), Türkiye's strong historical, diplomatic, economic, and defense cooperation with the two Horn countries helped it enter the mediation process with confidence.

Türkiye's recent mediation endeavor resonates with its previous mediation engagements, as seen with the Balkan countries. Starturka (2024) noted, "Turkiye continues to increase its influence in the Balkans through both economic and political engagements. Experts emphasize that Turkiye has become a reliable partner for Balkan countries due to its economic investments and political initiative". Ultimately, Turkish mediation diplomacy helped de-escalate the Ethio-Somalia tension, culminating in the historic "Ankara Declaration," signed on 11 December 2024. Following the Ankara discussion, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed stated in a press briefing, "Ethiopia's desire for secure access to the sea is a peaceful venture and will benefit our neighbors, it is a venture that must

[2] Interview Data, 2024

be seen in the spirit of cooperation, not suspicion." While overseeing three rounds of discussion, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan also hailed the agreement, which would eventually ensure access to the sea for the landlocked country, Ethiopia. Therefore, from Ethiopia's perspective, the Ankara declaration represented a major diplomatic victory.

The Turkish-led mediation diplomacy underwent various phases before culminating in the historic Ankara declaration. Table 1.2 depicts a summary of these Turkish mediation efforts in chronological order.

Table 1.2 Phases of Turkish Mediation Endeavors on Ethio-Somalia Tension

Phase	Date	Discussion Type	Participants	Outcome
Phase I	July 2024	Direct talk	The Foreign Ministers of Ethiopia and Somalia conducted a direct discussion with the presence of Hakan Fidan	Agreed to reconvene for another round on August 12, 2024.
Phase II	On August 10 and 11, 2024	Separate Phone talks	Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan made a phone call with Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and Somalia's President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, separately	Setting a stage for upcoming ministerial level discussion
Phase III	August 12, 2024	Indirect and separate talk between Ethiopia and Somalia's Foreign Ministers	Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan conducted indirect and separate talks with Ethiopian Foreign Minister Taye Atseke Selassie and Somali Foreign Minister Ahmed Maalim Fiqi.	Failed to reach an agreement but the two countries agreed to hold another round of negotiations on September 17, 2024.
Phase IV: Final Agreement	December 2024	Direct discussion	Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, Somalia's President Hassan Sheikh Mohammed and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan hold a direct discussion	Ankara declaration

Source: Compiled by the Author from various media outlets

The various phases of discussion highlighted Türkiye's commitment to facilitating mediation between the disputing parties, regardless of the outcome. Fortunately, the December 2024 discussion mediated by President Erdoğan concluded with a "win-win-win solution," implying that the three states — Ethiopia, Türkiye, and Somalia — had benefited from the Ankara Declaration.. Ankara's diplomatic experience and commitment to peace-building efforts are immensely important as the Turkish government took the lead in mediating the Ethio-Somalia dispute that followed the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). Despite being wrongly interpreted as a means of annexation by the Somali government, and rejected by the Turkish government, Ethiopia hopes that the MoU will "pave the way to realize the country's aspiration to secure access to the sea and diversify its access to seaports" (Ethiopia News Agency, 2024). Nevertheless, Ankara's mediation diplomacy is believed to play a decisive role in resolving the dispute.

As demonstrated by the Ankara declaration, Türkiye's role as a mediator has been instrumental to Ethiopia–Türkiye relations. In this regard, some analysts have argued that, from the outset, Türkiye's rejection of the MoU was inconsistent with the tradition of Ethio-Turkish friendship. History proved that the Ethio - Turkish bilateral relationship was built on a rock foundation. For that to happen, for instance, Türkiye supported Ethiopia's cause and voted against Italy in the League of Nation's assembly. In response, Emperor Hailesellasie frequently expressed his interest in strengthening relations with Türkiye. Ethiopia will never forget these practical supports during its hardest time. As in the past, therefore, there is a reasonable ground to expect a similar determination from the Turkish government regarding Ethiopia's quest to access to sea ports.

Friendly countries like Türkiye seemed to understand Ethiopia's longstanding quest to access sea ports. This is a concern that even the President of Somalia, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, acknowledged amidst the controversy over the MoU. He unequivocally stated, "Somalia wants Ethiopia to have access to the sea", implying the tension between Ethiopia and Somalia is surmountable with the involvement of mediators like Turkiye. Indeed, Ankara needs to find the right balance with Ethiopia and Somalia. If Turkish mediation process fails without bringing the intended results, its economic interest could be jeopardized in both Ethiopia and Somalia (Daily Sabah, 2024). Furthermore, Turkiye's global prestige in the area of meditation diplomacy, which Turkiye claimed, more has been done on it, will be put into question. For the time being, Turkish mediation diplomacy seems on its right track[3]. Apparently, inspired by its mediation success on Ethio-Somalia dispute, Turkiye invited Sudan and United

[3] Interview Result, 2024

Arab Emirates for discussion, a move that embolden Turkish mediation diplomacy in the Horn of Africa.

Conclusion

Türkiye's strong commitment to mediation diplomacy, and its efforts to position itself as a neutral and reliable mediation partner, makes Türkiye a successful mediation actor.. The presence of multiple institutional frameworks for mediation diplomacy, and its track record of mediation efforts, attest to this, particularly under AKP rule. . Yet, its mediation efforts have faced multiple challenges such as such as difficulty striking a delicate balance between competing interests and limited capacity to control the outcomes of its mediation efforts. It should be noted that Turkish mediation diplomacy in the Horn region has introduced a new dynamic, having a potential to reshape alliances and the security terrain of the region in the years to come, as epitomized by the Ankara declaration. Notably, the declaration challenges Egypt's ambition while promoting Ethiopia's national interest in the Horn of Africa. Given the fact that Turkiye has limited capacity to influence the fruition of Turkish mediation diplomacy, bringing a lasting peace between Ethiopia and Somalia will depend on their tangible actions on the ground. Therefore, the two countries needs to come closer than ever with a win-win solution.

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